

Air Transport Command

The functions of Air Transport Command remain largely as they were prior to integration. The capability of the Command, however, has been increased dramatically by the purchase of 20 additional C.130 Hercules aircraft to provide a strategic airlift for the Canadian armed forces. The capability of this Command must be further augmented in the years ahead in order to meet adequately the philosophy of mobility, as set out in the White Paper. Studies on the best cost-effective equipment for this expansion are under way.

Operational Readiness

As I mentioned earlier, we have continued to perform a wide spectrum of defence and peace-keeping operations. Two additional requests for United Nations support were received in September and December of last year. On September 22, the Secretary-General asked us to supply a number of officers to participate in the United Nations India-Pakistan Observer Mission. Highly-qualified officers were soon on their way to take up their new duties. At the same time, our contribution to the United Nations Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan was increased from nine to 19 by the despatch of ten officers. This group now consists of two naval, 13 army and four air force officers. In addition, we increased our contribution of aircraft by two Caribou and three Otter aeroplanes, manned and maintained by approximately 100 air force personnel located at Lahore, Pakistan. This unit provides air transport service both for the United Nations Military Observer Group, India and Pakistan, and the United Nations India-Pakistan Observer Mission.

In December, Canada was asked to provide air units for the Zambian oil airlift. On December 22, an advance party left Canada, and on December 30, the first oil airlift was effectively carried out. The response to this request and the quick reaction capability clearly demonstrated the effectiveness of the Canadian armed forces to meet contingencies.

The ground forces, too, are continually exercising their quick-reaction capability. The First Battalion Black Watch battalion group, currently designated as Canada's contribution to the Allied Command Europe mobile force, has recently undergone a strenuous training programme, designated Exercise "White Caribou" in Newfoundland. On February 27, this battalion group will participate in Exercise "Winter Express", scheduled for northern Norway. This will provide an opportunity to practise its role along with the five other NATO nations participating. It will be the first time that the Canadian armed forces have attempted to airlift a battalion group over a considerable distance in a realistic time-frame. This exercise, therefore, plays a most important part in the continued development of the strategic mobile force concept.

It may interest Honourable Members to know that 18 or 19 Air Transport Command heavy aircraft will be employed in this airlift and, that in addition, HMCS Provider, our operational support ship on the East Coast, will participate in the deployment and re-deployment phases of the exercise.